

## The Spring Indie Americana Roundup by Peter Stone Brown

If one thing is clear about popular music in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it's that more and more musicians aren't bothering with major labels and doing it themselves promoting themselves over the internet with the usual social networking sites and music-based social networking sites. Others are on tiny labels that they may or may not have a hand in. Still, getting the word out isn't necessarily easy. All the musicians in this article fit in one way or another into that very broad category of "Americana Music," a category invented by the music industry for people who play roots oriented music that doesn't fit neatly into today's radio play lists. The other thing these albums have in common is they all find a way to comment on current times.

[David Vest](#), who has been known to write for *CounterPunch* is back with a new album, *Roadhouse Revelation* on Cordova Bay Records. Recorded in the same studio with the same musicians as Vest's last album, *East Meets Vest*, the new album is to say the least a bit more rocking, kicking things off with a powerful train beat on "Freight Train Rolling." The sound of the album is just great, you feel as if you're in the room with the musicians. Vest is a strong singer, and he doesn't quite sound like anyone else, but more important that, he's soulful and imbues each song with passion.

The songs are mostly original with the exception of a cover of one Hank Williams' greatest and scariest songs, "Ramblin' Man," which shows how easily Williams' songs can be rocked up, and a song co-written with Paul DeLay, "Crooked Politician" that truly deserves airplay constantly on whatever is left of hip radio.

The album is full of great boogie woogie, excursions to New Orleans and as the title indicates barrelhouse piano, and Vest is one of the best piano players out there. That said, the song that hits me the hardest is the song that's closer to a soul ballad, "You Came Through." It's one that's hard to play just once.

An equally great piano player is **Floyd Domino**, best known as the original piano player of Western Swing band, Asleep At The Wheel. Domino joined with **Maryann Price**, best known for her work with Dan Hicks & His Hot Licks, but was also a member of Asleep At The Wheel for a few years, as well as a member of The Kinks! *Upfront* ([NewTex Records](#)) is a mixture of swing and jazz and it's a hell of a lot of fun. The backing is string bass and drums, with the superb fiddle player Kenny Kosek appearing on several tracks.

Domino who is on the mark, but never showy, takes a fine extended solo on "The Apology." Price is a master of vocal phrasing, fitting an incredible amount of words and syllables into a space they shouldn't fit in. There is a lot of sarcasm and humor behind her vocals on songs such as "I Might Be Doing Something Right." There is a lot of sly writing and lyrical craft on these songs that goes back to another time, yet curiously apply to now. They revisit a classic Dan Hicks tune, "O'Reilly at the Bar," before closing with the original, "The Damndest Finest Ruins" which may well be the highlight of the album. [The Silver Threads](#) are a band playing the bars and clubs of San Francisco who fit right into the usual conception of Americana, lyrically strong rock and roll that's based in country and blues. Their second album *The Organ Grinders Dance* was just released. Led by singer Dylan Orlando who also plays guitar and piano, the band plays a wide range of material from straight country to swing, with a bit of straight ahead rock and roll. Their debut album *Last Witness* was thematically structured with the first half being ruminations on the death of a friend and the second on the state of the state with one song utilizing lines from several Obama speeches from the first campaign.

*Organ Grinder* has no set theme and is a bit looser in feel. The album opens with the somewhat stately "Lately" featuring a majestic solo from guitarist Russell Bourne, and quickly moves into country on "Bury Me," swing on "Mood Swinging," and then gets deep and mysterious on "It Wasn't You."

Among the standouts are "Long Way," which is somewhere in gospel meets the Rolling Stones territory, the delightfully pretty "Wildflower In Winter," and the Dylan-esque "Pine Box." The songs are credited to the entire band but Orlando is the force behind them. Either way the band knows enough about its influences to keep things on the rough side and always funky. The high point is the lengthy ballad, "Ain't That What You Get" where the influence of the great poetic songwriters of the last 50 years really comes through and hits with emotional impact.

Michael Weiskopf is a New York City based singer-songwriter, who just released his second album, *Suffering Fools*. Weiskopf is open about being influenced by the musical explosion of the '60s, the singer-songwriters who emerged from the folk movement, but also the British Invasion, Motown and Soul music. Dylan is clearly a major influence and Weiskopf also is the lead singer of The Complete Unknowns, a group that celebrates Dylan's music and was also a member of two other groups that played music of the '60s, The Lost Keys and Psychedelic Summer.

Many of his songs are blatantly political and topical, and while one can detect a bit of Phil Ochs on "Thank You Canada (The Ted Cruz song)," lyrically Weiskopf is closer to Bruce Cockburn. In fact, he closes the album with Cockburn's "Pacing The Cage," and also includes a cover of Bob McDill's "Good Ole Boys Like Me," a 1980 country hit for Don Williams. Musically, Weisskopf explores what once was called folk-rock with occasional touches of twang and country. However he is at his best when he stays away from obvious targets like Cruz and digs deeper. "No Reason," is an epic tune that has a clear debt to Dylan's "It's Alright, Ma," both musically and structurally. With laser like precision, Weisskopf explores every aspect of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century daily horror, the constant wars, the spying, the lying, the technology, the poverty, the pollution, the destruction, the corruption, the corporate madness, and he pulls it off.

"Frozen" echoes much later Dylan, namely "Ain't Talkin'." Both songs borrow heavily from the traditional "Wayfaring Stranger," and both songs start with a theme of walking, and though Weisskopf ultimately tells a different story entirely, it may be a little too close for comfort, though everything about the way he sings it tells you he means it, and despite the obvious comparison, it keeps you listening.

The most powerful song is "[Guns Don't Kill.](#)" Written a few days after the Sandy Hook incident, Weisskopf avoids the usual gun control clichés and instead writes from inside the mind of the mass murderer. He wisely keeps it general enough so it could be any of the mass shooters, none of them or one yet to come. The result is powerful, disturbing and scary. This is a song that not only deserves to be heard, but needs to be heard.